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**Testimony of
Permanent Commission on the Status of Women
Submitted to the
Veteran's Affairs Committee
February 23, 2016**

**Re: S.B. 21, AN ACT CONCERNING THE MILITARY DEPARTMENT'S
NONDISCRIMINATION LAWS**

S.B. 205, AN ACT CONCERNING WOMEN VETERANS

Senators Flexer and Henri and Representatives Hennessey and Yaccarino, and distinguished members of the Veterans Affairs Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women (PCSW) in support of S.B. 21, An Act Concerning the Military Department's Nondiscrimination Laws and S.B. 205, An Act Concerning Women Veterans.

The number of women in the military today continues to rise and women's roles in our national defense are constantly evolving. Today, women constitute approximately 20 percent of new recruits, 14.5 percent of the 1.4 million active duty component and 18 percent of the 850,000 reserve component. While the number of male veterans is expected to decline by 2020, the number of female veterans is expected to grow dramatically, to 11 percent of the overall veteran population.¹

**S.B. 21, AN ACT CONCERNING THE MILITARY DEPARTMENT'S
NONDISCRIMINATION LAWS**

In December of last year, Defense Secretary Ashton Carter announced that the United States military had opened all combat roles to women. Many female service members have been serving in combat zones but have been officially denied membership in infantry positions. S.B. 21, An Act Concerning the Military Department's Nondiscrimination Laws, is one way Connecticut can apply the goals of the Defense Secretary's announcement by ensuring that Connecticut service members who serve in the National Guard are protected from discrimination.

S.B. 21 inserts the Connecticut Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities (CHRO) anti-discrimination guidelines into the Military Department's statutes, making it illegal for the Connecticut

¹ Women Veterans: The Long Journey Home

National Guard to discriminate based on religion, national origin, color, race, sex, gender identity or expression, and sexual orientation. This is a long overdue change and one the PCSW heartily endorses.

S.B. 205, AN ACT CONCERNING WOMEN VETERANS

Women represent the fastest growing group of veterans who are enrolling in VA healthcare and yet a third of VA medical centers do not have a gynecologist on staff. In a 2015 report commissioned by Disabled American Veterans (DAV), serious gaps were identified in every aspect of the programs that serve women, including healthcare, employment, finance, housing, social issues and the eradication of sexual assault.² Women have differing needs from their male veteran counterparts and programs must adapt and change to meet those needs.

During the 2015 legislative session, Connecticut lawmakers passed Public Act 15-8, which charged the Department of Veteran's Affairs with establishing a women's veteran's program. Among other things, the program was asked to submit recommendations for improving benefits and services available to women veterans. S.B. 205, An Act Concerning Women Veterans seeks to enact many of the recommendations made in that report including a woman's veterans' coordinator to provide centralized administrative support, a quick reference guide for female veterans, training, public service announcements, and a website dedicated to matters of concern for women veterans.

The PCSW appreciates this committee and the legislature's support of women veterans. Women who have served our country deserve consistent access to a full range of gender-sensitive benefits and services. We are hopeful that this legislation sets us on a path to do just that.

Thank you for your consideration of this important issue.

² <https://www.dav.org/wp-content/uploads/women-veterans-study.pdf>